

# Memorial Meeting

OF THE

Medical Society of the District of Columbia,  
Held November 22, 1899,

IN HONOR OF

Daniel Webster Prentiss, A. M., M. D.

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SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE

Born May 21, 1843.

Died November 19, 1899.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.





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*D. Webster Prentiss*





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Daniel Webster Prentiss, A. M., M. D.

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In stating the object of the meeting, the President in the Chair, Dr. Busey, expressed deep regret that bodily infirmity would not permit him to address the Society in memory of Dr. Prentiss.

On motion of Dr. J. Ford Thompson, the President was authorized to appoint a committee of five to draft suitable resolutions upon the death of Dr. Prentiss.

The Chair appointed Drs. J. Ford Thompson, W. W. Johnston, T. C. Smith, A. F. A. King, and Francis P. Morgan.

After a brief recess, Dr. Thompson presented the following memorial :

The Medical Society of the District of Columbia having met to do honor to the memory of Dr. Daniel Webster Prentiss, who died at his home in Washington on the 19th day of November at

the age of 56 years, adopts this memorandum and places it upon record.

Dr. Prentiss became a member of this Society in 1864, since that date he has been an active participant in its scientific work and a warm promoter of all measures that tend to advance the best interests of the profession.

The papers read by Dr. Prentiss have always added something real to existing knowledge ; much of his work has been original and his writings all show the characteristics of his early work in natural science. The cases reported by him were usually of rare forms of disease or of conditions before undescribed. These reports were prepared with great care, and were models of exact description ; no time or trouble was spared in making them as perfect as they could be made in all their details, and a paper

read by Prentiss was always a call for a large attendance of members.

In debate Dr. Prentiss said what was worth hearing, his range of knowledge was great, and there was rarely a discussion to which he was not able to add something of value. In his chosen department of therapeutics, he showed an advanced and original mode of thinking, and his statements on subjects of treatment were regarded as authoritative.

Few men have been less narrow in the manner of dealing with the more intricate problems of medicine; this quality was, undoubtedly, the result of continued interest in general science and of an association with men devoted to the most varied scientific pursuits. He was thus kept in touch with all the lines of advance and helped in his own work by the work of other scientific departments.

In his personal relations with his associates Dr. Prentiss was always the kind and sympathetic worker.

During the many years of our association with him in our meetings we have known him to be the same undeviating friend, the same earnest worker in the fields of science and the same devoted seeker after truth.

No monument can be more enduring than the record of a life devoted to the best interests of humanity, and as a practitioner of medicine he has gained the well-merited name of being a conscientious physician ever mindful of the welfare of those committed to his care. No toil was too great when his aid was asked for, and the obligation to his patient called forth the most active and persevering effort.

We can feel but the sincerest grief at the loss of an esteemed associate for whom during life we have had the warmest friendship, and whose memory

we shall always guard as a precious possession.

This Society, in thus expressing its own grief, does not omit to feel the deepest sympathy for the afflicted family, and hereby tenders them its assurances of heartfelt condolence.

J. FORD THOMPSON,  
W. W. JOHNSTON,  
T. C. SMITH,  
A. F. A. KING,  
FRANCIS P. MORGAN.

Committee.

*Remarks by Dr. J. Ford Thompson.*

Mr. President: In submitting the resolutions framed by your committee on the death of Dr. D. W. Prentiss to the consideration of this Society, I must acknowledge to some embarrassment at the inadequacy of such a report to fulfill the requirements of so solemn and distressing an occasion as the one in which we are now called upon to participate.

Death has been a frequent visitor of late to our ranks, and we have had to mourn the loss of men whose lives have been shining lights and whose memories we shall ever hold dear and cherish, but I recall no instance where we have had more reason for lamentation and sorrow than this, our last tribute to one who has commanded all through his professional life, the respect and admiration of his brethren and the love and gratitude of the community in which he passed his life.

Death is always sad and its contemplation in all its varied phases is a heavy burden which the medical man must bear as a part of the duties incident to his chosen calling, but it is something to which he can never become callous and which never fails to increase the wear and tear of his exacting labors, and when it enters our own circle to pick out



the noblest and the best, often it would seem, at an untimely age, we experience a sensation of despair that all our philosophical learning is helpless to alleviate. There appears to be but one poor consolation or recompense, and that is without effect upon those most near and dear, it is the admiration we naturally feel for him who dies a hero's death, for such is he who, in the midst of a successful and brilliant career, is stricken down whilst yet in the performance of the highest and noblest duties. And it is true that time would have added nothing to his reputation nor could it have changed the estimation in which his character was held, for his life was full and ripe and ready for the sacrifice, but it is all the more dear to those who knew and appreciated his noble qualities of heart and mind, and they can never cease to mourn his loss as irreparable.

His was of a temperament and mind admirably fitted for a doctor's life, and I think the promptings of instinct directed him to the choice of a vocation in which he could best serve his fellow-men and satisfy at the same time his aspirations, and it is a pity that this is not always the case. Certainly it is true, that our profession demands a peculiar endowment for its highest purposes, without which its duties are imperfectly performed and the life it entails becomes irksome and unsatisfactory, whereas the natural physician not only patiently endures its cares and tribulations but sheds light and consolation upon all who come under his happy influence. No one, I am sure, who knew Prentiss well will question the fact of his possessing these attributes to a high degree.

He began the study of medicine with a well-trained mind and was gifted with scientific traits whose cultivation added

materially to his reputation as a man and a physician, as the records of the various scientific societies of the country can richly testify. I made his acquaintance soon after his graduation, and his first professional experience was in a hospital with me, about the close of the civil war, and from that time to this we have been more or less associated in professional work, and during all this time he never failed to impress me as a man of solid worth, honest and upright in all the relations of life and worthy of the highest encomiums which may be offered this evening to his honor and memory.

*Remarks by Dr. W. W. Johnston.*

I have been very closely associated with Dr. Prentiss for many years and have learned to have the highest opinion of his qualities of mind and heart, and of the many admirable traits that made him a valued friend.

It may not be amiss to say a word about the series of conditions that have more than anything else influenced Prentiss' life and work during the last ten years. I mean the state of health that has taxed his energies and hampered him in all his efforts to develop the powers that he felt himself to be possessed of. This ill health was due to a slowly developing organic cerebral disease, fluctuating in its progress, yet cruelly and uninterruptedly progressive and ultimately fatal. Added to this there has been a permanent condition of debility or exhaustion due to overwork in the beginning, and kept up by continued overwork at a time when all work was injurious in the extreme. Thus the natural progress of a disease that might have been delayed or arrested was hastened to a fatal termination at an age, when, but for this, Prentiss would have been at his best. For years the battle was



fought bravely. Work was continued only by dint of great effort and with the help of an occasional enforced summer rest. For years it was Prentiss' custom to work continuously from morning until 2 o'clock, he then went to bed and remained until 4. His office work and dinner kept him until 5, and from then until 9 or 10 he was visiting patients outside. It was this daily afternoon rest that was absolutely necessary to enable him to continue his task from day to day. A supreme effort was made to recover strength and health by the complete abandonment of work for one year, divided between Bermuda and Europe. The result was not what was hoped for, and since then the struggle, kept up by the frequent cessation of work for short periods, has been harder than ever. After a summer in the Adirondacks he returned to the city apparently very much better, and his own hope of greater activity was shown in his pledges to prepare papers involving a great deal of labor for which he was clearly physically unfit. His lectures this winter were also given with renewed zest. But it was the flash in the pan; after a lecture at the college, sudden symptoms developed that soon proved to be those of sub-acute meningitis and death came in coma in 10 days.

I know of no greater heroism than was shown in Prentiss' life. It was not a battle of a day, but of years; not one deed of bravery, but a daily, hourly fight with an enemy who won at last, but who was beaten to earth many times. In all these years, Prentiss in his relations with his friends, gave no sign of what he endured; even to those nearest to him he was reserved as to the worst. He concealed almost to the end the knowledge that he would surely suc-

cumb before his course was fairly run.

More might be said but this is enough to show that our eulogies of our dear friend are based upon many qualities that can be divined rather than known.

Although such a sufferer, Prentiss' work as a practitioner was continued with unstinted zeal. For many years his practice was as large as he chose to make it.

His methods of work were very exact, and he gave great attention to details. This was shown in the careful recording of his cases, and in the minute directions he gave as to treatment. No one could meet him in consultation without being struck with the clearness of his views on all subjects. His mind was singularly broad and free from bias and prejudice and in his manner he impressed one as being a man without pretense of any sort.

When he met with a peculiar symptom or set of symptoms he did not rest until he had cleared away all the obscurities and made a correct diagnosis. This was shown in the case of syphilitic intermittent fever reported by him to the Society last year. In this instance he successively tried every possible theory by the test of reason and by employing every method of investigation. By exclusion of all other possible causes he finally reached the conclusion that the fever was of syphilitic origin. The specific treatment quickly confirmed this view and cured the patient.

Dr. Prentiss' sense of honor was of the highest; there was no balancing in mind between the claims of integrity and those of time serving. The scales were borne down only with the weight of honesty of act as well as of intention. Thoughtfulness and earnestness were his essential characteristics. His mind was



built on a serious model. How much of this was the result of his physical suffering it would be difficult to say. Conjoined to a natural gravity there was undoubtedly a state of mind that was the acquired habit of a personal experience.

Much more might be added, and much more would be needed to show all the different phases of a character so full of the best traits of the best manhood. I would, however, dwell only on those qualities that made him the type of a sincere, strong, earnest man, and a truth-loving, truth-seeking devotee of science.

*Remarks by Dr. T. C. SMITH:*—Dr. Smith said that the occasion of the meeting which had called the members of the Society together to do honor to the memory of Dr. Prentiss, was one of deepest sorrow to him inasmuch as there had existed between them a warm friendship for more than forty years, a friendship not disturbed by a shadow of difference, or unfaithfulness. He had become acquainted with Dr. Prentiss in his earlier years, and the results of the chance meeting showed how the course of one's life may be changed by a seemingly trivial event. He was very fond of hunting, and all birds were alike to him so far as interest in them went after he had brought them down. Upon one of his hunting excursions, he ran across Dr. Prentiss whom he did not then know, and noticed that it was the Doctor's custom to preserve carefully the birds which he shot, and afterward to stuff and study them. This led him to study Ornithology, and brought him frequently in Dr. Prentiss' society. Subsequently, he introduced the Doctor to the lady he afterward married.

Dr. Prentiss always utilized good company and good friends, and so he made

good use of his acquaintance with Prof. Baird, and under his tutelage, he became a skillful ornithologist. He became associated with Dr. Coues in publishing a list of birds found in the District of Columbia.

After this he began the study of medicine and soon after, introduced Dr. Smith to the dissecting room, the school then occupying the building where the printing office of McGill and Wallace now stands. It was not much of a building then, but good work was done there. The effect of Dr. Prentiss' influence was always elevating, and they graduated within a week of each other; afterward, they were married within a week of each other.

Dr. Prentiss got him into one great difficulty, and he had not succeeded in getting out of it yet; for at his instigation he was appointed Chairman of the Essay Committee in the Medical Society.

The interest which the Doctor manifested in the welfare of the Society was very great. He was always ready to read papers, take part in discussions, or present specimens. In a recent letter, he had signified his intention to read a paper at a meeting in January next, upon the subject of Tuberculosis. He did not then know what was ahead of him.

He was a hard and persevering worker; and his untimely death was largely due to overwork. He had told Dr. Smith sometime before his death that had he taken needed rest, he would not have broken down, and that this was a fact there can be no question.

The world has many heroes, but the medical profession has heroes greater than those in any other line of occupation. How many of our former associates can we now recall who were cut off

by an untimely death caused by overtaxing body and brain. Ashford, Drinkard, Carroll Morgan, and now Prentiss, and little thanks many of them got for their labors.

What he had said had been mainly from the point of view of personal friendship. Could he but speak to Dr. Prentiss now, he would like to paraphrase the words of Mrs. Barbauld's beautiful poem, and say

Friend, "We've been long together  
Through pleasant and through cloudy  
weather.  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear.  
Then steal away, give little warning;  
Choose thine own time:  
Say not 'good-night,'  
But in some brighter clime  
Bid me 'Good-morning'."

*Remarks by Dr. A. F. A. King.*

Dr. King said that he felt that he could heartily coincide in all that had been said as to the skill, conscientiousness, and eminent qualities of mind and heart of our late associate, Dr. Prentiss. He would confine his remarks to him as a teacher in the Medical School.

He could recall the first time that he ever saw Dr. Prentiss—at the end of the term, in 1861. He, himself was then a student about to graduate at the Medical School of Columbian University, which was located on E street, then running through Judiciary Square. There were only 60 or 70 students and every one knew every other, at least by sight. One day, two strangers entered, and took seats on the middle aisle—he could point out those seats now were the building still standing. The two were D. W. Prentiss and Eliot Coues. Probably it was Prentiss' intention to study medicine at that time. In a few months,

however, the college sessions were suspended, owing to the buildings having been burned, and they were not resumed until two or three years afterwards. Dr. Prentiss therefore went to the University of Pennsylvania, from which, in due time, he graduated.

Dr. Prentiss' career in the Medical School began as early as '66 or '67. The lectures were then given in the old Fifth Street Church, where the Columbian Law Building now stands, and about that time an "auxiliary faculty" was established, composed of Drs. Prentiss, Todd, Middleton, J. T. Young, and himself. Dr. Prentiss was appointed adjunct professor of chemistry, and lectured upon mineralogy. He gave lectures in the summer course upon the diagnosis of special diseases. Some time later the faculty discontinued the "auxiliary faculty," and the lecturers were unceremoniously dropped, without fee or reward, or even so much as thanks for their services. They felt that they had not been sufficiently appreciated, and he remembered that Dr. Prentiss especially felt the injustice—but all bore it as gracefully as they could. Upon the death of Dr. Riley, in 1879, Dr. Prentiss was appointed Professor of Materia and Therapeutics, and he filled the position almost uninterruptedly until a week before he died.

His career at the Medical School may be viewed from two aspects: first, as to his relations to the students; and, second, as to his relations to the faculty. As professor of materia medica—usually considered an uninteresting subject to lecture upon—he taught in such a way that there was no lack of interest, and no student slept during his lecture. He



had a dogged, earnest, persevering way of dealing with, and systematizing study, and of making it interesting. The dull portions were enlivened and made practical by descriptions of cases from his own wide experience, and that of other practitioners. He sought especially to render the students capable of writing prescriptions—such as they must needs write later. He remembered Dr. Prentiss sending to him, as Dean, bills for many thousands of prescription blanks for the use of the students in their work; it was the right method because it was practical. He was always progressive, and was ever stretching out for any possible advance. Years ago, he took up in his instructions and his own prescription-writing—the metric system—which many of us cannot use today.

As lecturer, he never attempted anything like oratorical display. His was a clear, straightforward style of expression, which always held the attention, and imparted to the best advantage the information which he sought to convey to the students. No professor was more esteemed by them than Dr. Prentiss. In the examination room, while the standard which he required was high, he was ever a genial, kindly, and gentle examiner, avoiding in his manner anything which would tend to add to the embarrassment of the students who came before him.

As a member of the Faculty, and a factor in the government of the school, his judgment was good, and, although he was always the first to enter upon a new line of progress, he was the most ambitious of us all in this, he never over-stepped the mark of wisdom and prudence. When the proposition to borrow \$10,000 or more to start a Dental School and renovate a building which was not

ours, arose, he favored the plan, and now, 12 or 14 years later, we appreciate the wisdom of his decision. Hence, it may truly be said that in endeavoring to establish innovations and enter upon new lines of progress, he was always at the front, and judiciously at the front. True, he had differences with us, and with others, but his discussions were kindly and without animosity.

We remember the last time we saw him yesterday, surrounded by mourning friends and flowers. He now rests in peace. All we can do is to weave garlands of honor to his memory.

*Remarks by Dr. C. W. Richardson.*

I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without expressing my feelings and paying tribute to the memory of our deceased friend, Dr. D. W. Prentiss.

He has been to me not only a friend and advisor but my relationship which was brought about by the careful attention to the members of my household while acting in the capacity of family physician has been of the most intimate character.

I came to know Dr. Prentiss on returning to Washington and entering into the practice of medicine. I then learned to cultivate that fondness for him which ripened into the warmest affection and friendship. He was always ready to lend attentive ear and to give kind advice to the young practitioner. As a consultant he was always ready to listen and to advise and, if necessary, correct errors in a kindly and considerate spirit.

There is no tribute too high that one could pay to the memory of such a valued friend and kind physician.

*Dr. Reyburn* said that as we note the dropping away of these dear friends whom we have known so long, and when we think of the many who have

left us whom we knew 10, 20, or even 30 years ago, we are reminded that our time will soon come. It has been remarked that there are no martyrs now, but this is not so; the physician must give himself as a sacrifice, and in this trait Dr. Prentiss was preeminent.

He was not only a good physician but an able scholar. As a scholar, gentleman, and physician, he stood without a peer. He could do no better in closing than to quote the lines.

"None knew him but to love him,  
Nor named him but to praise."

*Dr. Winter* said that in the death of Dr. Prentiss he had lost one of the best friends he had in the profession. While they were about the same age, he had always felt that Dr. Prentiss was many years his senior, as he had graduated, and was practicing as a Contract Surgeon in one of the Hospitals in this city, during the latter part of the Civil War while he, Dr. Winter did not graduate until 1870. They became friends about twenty-five ago, and it has been his privilege to aid the Doctor many times, especially before he moved to 14th street, as he was even then a sufferer from nervous exhaustion, his pulse rate being almost always over a hundred. Dr. Prentiss came to him when death entered his household, and gave him his sympathy, and stood with him at the open grave, and when it came time to stand by and see the body of his friend lowered into the grave, he felt like repeating, and did repeat in his heart, the words of the old hymn, "God be with you 'til we meet again."

*Dr. Butler* said that as one of the younger members, he could not let the opportunity pass without saying a word in memory of Dr. Prentiss. The Doctor

had been his preceptor when he was a student, and he knew him as a kind, sincere and true friend, ever willing to give advice upon the many subjects upon which his counsel was valuable. We all remember his kindly words and manner, and count it a privilege to have known him, and we shall hold his memory dear.

*Dr. Francis P. Morgan* said that his acquaintance with Dr. Prentiss began in childhood when the Doctor called as the family physician; and he remembered clearly his dignified, yet kindly bearing, and the feeling imparted by his mere presence that all was well. As he had seen him in later years under different, often trying, circumstances, in the sick-room, he had grown to respect to the fullest extent his remarkable ability and skill in his chosen profession.

His whole life was characterized by a persistent and persevering devotion to duty. This was manifested even more in his later years as his bodily infirmity became greater, and he gave his last lecture only a week before he died. Before leaving his home for his last lecture, both Mrs. Prentiss and he had tried their best to persuade the Doctor not to lecture that evening, but his gentle but firm reply was characteristic. He said: "I have undertaken the work, and will go through it." Another remonstrance at the school met with a like response, and he barely finished his lecture before his strength failed. Dr. Prentiss' writings have added much of permanent value to the literature of Medicine. This is especially true of his researches upon the subjects of Anhalonium Lewinii, and Pilocarpin. He was a careful, accurate, and thorough investigator, and a lucid writer, and his conclusions carried weight and conviction. A list of



Dr. Prentiss' writings is as follows:

"Report on Disinfectants for the Board of Health of the District of Columbia," 1867. "A Case of Morphine Poisoning," 1867. "Diphtheria and Tracheotomy," "Membraneous Croup," "Operations for the Radical Cure of Hernia," 1868. "Case of Inflammation of the Fibrous Capsule of the Eyeball," 1868. "Case of Spurious Labor Pains at the Fifth Month," 1870. "Convulsions after Profuse Hemorrhage from Abortion at the Sixth Week," 1870. "Obstruction of the Bowels in an Infant, with Autopsy," 1870. "Hysterical Tetanus," 1879. "Case of Mastoid Abscess Opening into the Lateral Sinus and Death from Pyæmia," 1882. "Is Croupous Pneumonia a Zymotic Disease?" 1874. "Chorea in Pregnancy," 1874. "Abscess of the Liver," 1874. "Case of Double Hydronephrosis, with Specimen," 1883. "A Remarkable Case of Hysteria, with Paralysis and Aphasia," 1883. "Cases of Poisoning by Atropia, by Opium, and by Quinine," 1880. "On the Revision of the Pharmacopœia of 1880," 1881. "Death from Diphtheritic Paralysis," 1881. "Remarkable Change in the Color of the Hair from Blonde to Almost Black in a Patient while under Treatment by Hydodermic Injections of Pilocarpin," 1881. "A case of Prolonged Anuria," 1881. "Membraneous Croup Created by Pilocarpin, Change in the Color of the Hair," 1881. "Overdose of Podophyllin," 1882. "Maternal Impressions—

Effect on Foetus." 1883. "Answer to Protest Against the use of the Metric system in Prescription Writing." 1883. "Croupous Pneumonia." 1880. "Report of the Pharmacopœial Convention of 1880." "Avi-Fauna Columbina." By Drs. E. Coues. and D. W. Prentiss. "Gall-stones, or Soap." 1888. "A Report of 500 Consecutive Cases of Labor in Private Practice." 1889. "A Case of Change in the Color of the Hair of old Age to Black, Produced by Jaborandi," 1889. "Three Cases of Poisoning by Japanese Lacquer; by Pellets Labelled 'Rhus;' and by Cashew Nuts." 1889. "Report of a Remarkable Case of Slow Pulse." 1889. "Purpurea Hemorrhagica Rheumatica." 1890. "Apoplexy Following La Grippe." 1890. Paper on Pilocarpin, read by invitation before the N. Y. Academy of Sciences." 1893. "Cases of Poisoning by Exalgine, Cannabis Indica, Arsenic, and Camphor." "Anhalonium Lewinii-Mescal Buttons." By Drs. D. W. Prentiss and F. P. Morgan. 1895. "Mescal Buttons." By Drs. Prentiss and Morgan. 1896. "Mescal Buttons: Therapeutic Uses, by Drs. Prentiss and Morgan: Plant and Ceremony by James Mooney." 1896. "Five Cases of Mushroom Poisoning, Three of which Proved Fatal; Treatment of the Poisoning." 1898. "A Case of Syphilitic Fever." 1898. "Bermuda as a Health Resort." 1898. "Three Cases of Paraldehyde Habit: Three cases of Administration of Formaldehyde by Mistake." 1899.







